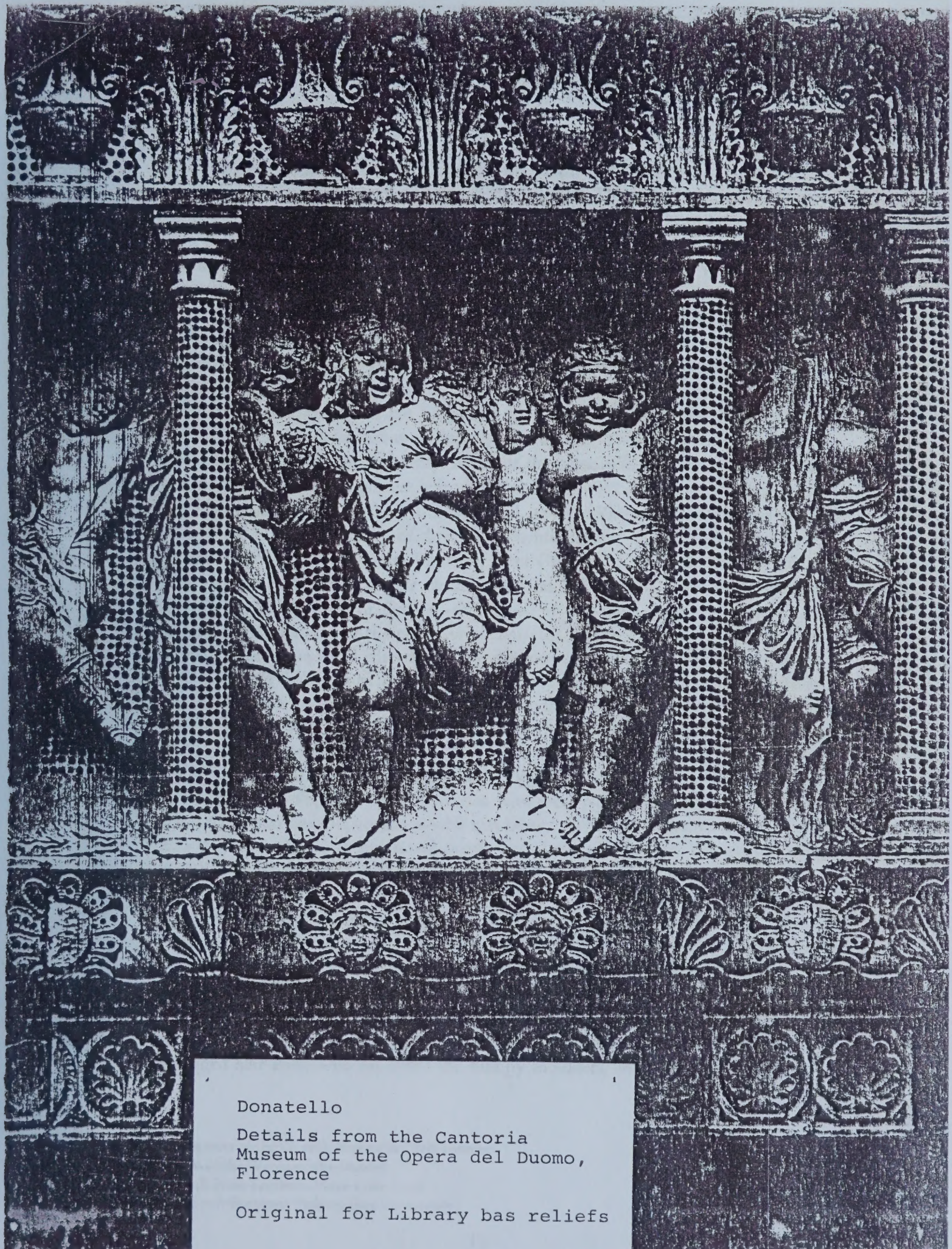


Donatello

Details from the Cantoria
Museum of the Opera del Duomo,
Florence

Original for Library bas reliefs

Library frieze — see print →

the conception or incarnation of Christ, which meant that the new year started nine months before Christmas, on the twenty-fifth of March. This is the Day of the Annunciation—one of the most popular subjects of Tuscan painting. The angel of the new year, with his lily, announcing the planting of a Sacred Seed to a peasant maiden, is evidently spring. The old Roman calendar had started the new year with the spring equinox—the twenty-first of March.

The forum or market place, later the Mercato Vecchio, had been framed by a triumphal arch (still remembered in the Middle Ages) and adorned with statues of emperors and magistrates. Those who complain of an absence of religious feeling in Florentine churches, finding them too plain, too sober, too, as it were, "protestant," will discover that feeling in the Bargello and in the Museum of the Works of the Duomo, which are dedicated to sculpture, like temples. These all-but-deserted sanctuaries are the holy places of the city. Much of the statuary in these two museums has been brought indoors, to protect it from the elements. Old Testament prophets from their high lookout posts on the Bell Tower; tall, ox-eyed Virgins from above the doorways of the Duomo; a group of three monumental figures—Saint Peter, Saint Paul, and the Virgin—from the Porta Romana; Saint George, lightly clad, with his shield from Orsanmichele, that peculiar church that was half a grain depot to be used in case of emergency, siege or famine—they stood at key posts, coigns of vantage, in the city, like watchmen of the public weal. Battered by the weather, they have taken on some of the primordial character of the elements they endured as protectors of the people. In their bunched or draped garments, with wide-open, deep-socketed stone eyes, they have a curious look of pilgrims or wayfarers who are gathered together in these shelters to await the next stage on the journey; other figures, from inside the churches, have joined them: several Baptists; a mitered pope, blessing; the singing, dancing children of Luca della Robbia and Donatello. Some, like the Doctors of the Church from the Poggio Imperiale avenue who were transformed into poets by the addition of laurel wreaths, are in a pitiable condition, resembling Immortals in a drunken disguise. They are a strange mixed crew, these holy persons, but this attests their holiness and the fact that they are pilgrims. Saint George, in his commanding niche at the Bargello, is a Spartan athlete or young Roman Empire-builder, swordless, in a light cloak, tied in a becoming bow around his handsome neck, intrepid eyes forward to the future; near him stands a starveling San Giovannino, the boy Baptist, daunted by his mission, gasping, with parted lips and staring eyes. Queer companions, as far apart as Achilles and the tortoise, yet both are by Donatello; both are profoundly moving and beautiful; both are patterns of courage. The resolute Saint George, mailed at arms, legs, and feet, wears no halo on his short manly locks; San Giovannino, irresolute, in his ragged hair shirt, with his thin arms, bumpy shoulders, and shrunken legs, has an

~~Two Doctors of the Church Redone as Poets Laureate~~
~~Museum of the Works of the Duomo~~
~~Nicolò di Piero Lamberti (circa 1370–1451)~~
~~and Piero di Giovanni Tedesco (late XIV century)~~

McCarthy, Mary The Stones of Florence
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